Claims

1. A secure computer resource access system, comprising:

a fingerprint reading device;

a store of fingerprint data corresponding to a plurality of different users;

an authorization system coupled to said reading device and configured to access said store and to associate an authorization level with a user based on the user's fingerprint;

an access mechanism that defines a plurality of different authorization levels associated with a plurality of file resources;

said access mechanism being responsive to said authorization system to control how a user can interact with said computer resource based on said associated authorization level.

2. The access system of claim 1 wherein said fingerprint reading device is integral with a pointing device of a computer system.

3. The access system of claim 1 wherein said fingerprint reading device is integral with a keyboard device of a computer system.

4. The access system of claim 1 wherein said store of fingerprint data employs a data structure for storing said fingerprint data in an encrypted format.

5. The access system of claim 4 wherein said encrypted format is protected by a software key.

6. The access system of claim 1 wherein said authorization system communicates with said store of fingerprint data across an encrypted channel.

7. The access system of claim 1 wherein said authorization system communicates with said store of fingerprint data across a computer network.

8. The access system of claim 1 wherein said access mechanism controls file access within a computer system.

9. The access system of claim 1 wherein said access mechanism controls network access within a computer system.

10. The access system of claim 1 wherein said access mechanism controls record access within a computer system.

11. The access system of claim 1 wherein said access mechanism controls resource access within a computer system.

12. The access system of claim 1 wherein said access mechanism controls feature access within a computer system.

13. A method of operating a computer system, comprising:

scanning the fingerprint of a user to generate user fingerprint data;

using said user fingerprint data to access a database of stored fingerprint data and to compare said user fingerprint data with stored fingerprint data;

assigning an access authorization datum to said user based on the results of said comparing step;

controlling how the user can interact with said computer system based on said assigned authorization datum.

14.   The method of claim 13 wherein said step of   using said user fingerprint data is performed across an encrypted channel.

15.   The method of claim 13 wherein said scanning step is performed using a reading device that is integral with a pointing device of said computer system.

16.   The method of claim 13 wherein said scanning step is performed periodically as the user interacts with said computer system.

17.   The method of claim 13 wherein said scanning step is performed in response to a predetermined action taken by the user in interacting with said computer system.

18.   The method of claim 17 wherein said predetermined action is a pointing device action taken by the user through operation of a reading device that is integral with a pointing device of said computer.

19.   The method of claim 13 wherein said controlling step includes controlling network access in a computer system.

20.   The method of claim 13 wherein said controlling step includes controlling file access in a computer system.

21.   The method of claim 13 wherein said controlling step includes controlling record access in a computer system.

22.   The method of claim 13 wherein said controlling step includes controlling resource access in a computer system.

23.   The method of claim 13 wherein said controlling step includes controlling feature access in a computer system.